



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

KYTC describes steps taken to ensure proper maintenance, operation of navigation lights on bridges

Points out ongoing repairs to lights on damaged Eggners Ferry Bridge

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 21, 2012) – The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) has informed the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) of steps taken in 2012 to ensure that navigation lights on bridges of the Commonwealth are working properly and that KYTC personnel who inspect and maintain the lights are properly trained.

In a letter to the NTSB, KYTC Secretary Mike Hancock also points out that the training of KYTC personnel, as well as inspection of all affected bridges and repairs of lighting where needed, was carried out well in advance of the NTSB's publicly recommending such action.

The NTSB, along with the U.S. Coast Guard, is investigating the crash of the M/V Delta Mariner, a ship owned by Foss Maritime Co., into the Eggners Ferry Bridge on the Tennessee River and Kentucky Lake on the night of Jan. 26. One span of the bridge was destroyed.

At the time of the crash – the maritime term is “allision” – a KYTC signal maintenance crew from Department of Highways District 1, Paducah, was engaged in a project to correct electrical short circuiting in the bridge's navigation lights.

On July 25, the NTSB issued a “Safety Recommendation” that called on KYTC to take steps that actually were taken months earlier – to verify the status and proper operation of navigation lighting, develop appropriate inspection and maintenance procedures and ensure that KYTC personnel were trained in those procedures.

“Before the issuance of the recommendations, KYTC took steps to address these issues,” Secretary Hancock said in the response letter to NTSB Chair Deborah A.P. Hersman.

That was not the only flaw in the NTSB letter. “In the interest of promoting public safety, the NTSB should be aware that some of the material facts recited in the Recommendation Letter

were erroneously stated or incomplete. As a result, the letter was inaccurate and confusing,” Secretary Hancock’s letter said.

For example, the NTSB cited a letter, dated Dec. 15, 2011, in which the Coast Guard notified the cabinet of reports from mariners that lights on the Eggners Ferry Bridge were not operating properly or were extinguished. The NTSB did not mention any responsive action by KYTC.

The NTSB letter “might be construed to mean that no work had been performed on the bridge lights since December 15, 2011,” Secretary Hancock’s letter said. “However, in fact, KYTC personnel had been working on the bridge lights since that date; moreover, KYTC personnel had been working on those lights during the week prior to the allision.”

The NTSB letter also failed to note that KYTC personnel, in keeping with the Coast Guard’s own protocol, kept the Coast Guard apprised that bridge lights were out. The Coast Guard, in keeping with the same protocol, issued multiple broadcast notices to mariners that lights were out on the Eggners Ferry Bridge.

“The failure to monitor the Coast Guard frequency by the pilot and crew of the Delta Mariner and their failure to heed these warnings was an indefensible oversight on their part leading up to the allision. Your omission of these facts misled the public to erroneously conclude that there was no effort by the KYTC to repair the lights and to warn of the outage when, in fact, the opposite is true. These relevant issues should be recognized by the NTSB so that there can be a fair and accurate understanding of the facts,” Secretary Hancock said.

KYTC maintains 8,957 bridges in the Commonwealth. Forty-five bridges, including the Eggners Ferry, are over navigable waters. Bridge maintenance is a major activity of the cabinet, and thus it is important for the NTSB to correct its record, Secretary Hancock said.

“Kentuckians can be assured that our cabinet’s employees work diligently to carry out our assigned mission of providing a safe, efficient and reliable transportation system,” Secretary Hancock said.

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